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A Graphic Odyssey: Romare Bearden as Printmaker at the Cleveland Museum of Art

"All painting is a kind of talking about life."
—Romare Bearden

(CLEVELAND, OH) Renowned artist Romare Bearden (1912-1988) used his powerful and provocative collages and prints to express his feelings about life as an African-American growing up in the South, the jazz era in Harlem, and his varied experiences during the troubled 1960s. **A Graphic Odyssey: Romare Bearden as Printmaker**, the first exhibition and catalogue to document Bearden's graphic works, will be on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art, April 22 through July 6, 1997. It coincides with the Museum's presentation of the exhibition **Alone in a Crowd: Prints by African-American Artists of the 1930s-40s from the Collection of Reba and Dave Williams**.

Bearden's art transcends color barriers and is respected not only as work by an African-American artist, but as the distinguished work of an American artist. His art depicts the experiences of a child in the South; a teenager coming of age in New York City right after the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s (the first self-conscious cultural movement among African-Americans); and an adult influenced by many sources.

In 1936-37, Bearden studied with artist George Grosz, who introduced him to the graphic work of Honore Daumier, Francisco Goya and Kathe Kollwitz—all of whom used art as a tool of social criticism and for whom printmaking was as important a medium as oil painting. Another influential figure for Bearden was Stuart Davis, an artist and avid jazz fan. Davis and Bearden listened to and were moved by the music of pianist Earl Hines. Davis helped Bearden use the music as a tool for enhancing his artwork. Bearden said, "Jazz has shown me the ways of achieving artistic structures that are personal to me..."

Also extremely influential for Bearden's work was his study of Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy in the 1950s.

(more . . .)

The exhibition includes 71 of Bearden's works. There are images related to the classical story of Ulysses, images of the South and of New York City, which explore urban life experiences and, particularly, the jazz scene. Many of Bearden's works depict biblical subjects. For example, he transformed a mundane scene of a woman bathing to symbolize baptism, a ritual of spiritual purification and cleansing. Bearden has characterized his work as "representing some consolidations of some memories, of some direct experiences from my childhood, on to the present." Museum curator Jane Glaubinger reflects, "Nourished by his cultural heritage and his educated upbringing, Bearden's art represents the twentieth-century experience of African-Americans, yet also contains universal meaning. Through his works, Bearden has helped us to see and feel the experiences of African-Americans, as well as recognize the cultural diversity that is a part of all of our lives."

Bearden saw life as many different layers of experiences. His work reflects this philosophy, as he layered his compositions with images, colors, shapes and forms. Bearden used lithography, etching and silkscreen, individually and combined. By the late 1960s, Bearden had become well-known for collage. Bearden's prints are similar to his collages in style and subject. He made use of printmaking as an outlet for experimentation and for broadening his audience.

Bearden said, "Most artists take some place, and like a flower, they sink roots, looking for universal implications. My roots are in North Carolina. I paint what people did when I was a little boy, like the way they got up in the morning. But I would like it to have more."

The exhibition is organized and circulated by the Council for Creative Projects, N.Y. The exhibition was organized in full cooperation with the Romare Bearden Foundation. The exhibition is curated in Cleveland by Jane Glaubinger, the museum's Curator of Prints.

Admission to the exhibition is free. Various public programs complement this exhibition and **Alone in a Crowd** (see enclosed news release). Promotional support is provided by *Cleveland Life* magazine and The Wave 107.3 FM. Charter One Bank is a partner in the educational programming for these exhibitions.

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